

Working with children that have different needs and abilities

Approaches to Learning

Approaches to Learning – Children with different needs and abilities

Many kinds of learning take place in natural settings—classroom, home, community. Children watch and imitate—model their behavior from others. **ALL** young children are eager to learn and will try to do things they see their friends doing.

To facilitate learning in children with different abilities, teachers can provide detail feedback and descriptive praise to the child: “Tommy, you are climbing the ladder by yourself, carefully holding each rung and using one hand and one foot at a time.” This type of praise serves multiple purposes:

- Tommy is encouraged to appreciate his own skills.
- Other children see Tommy and try to model him and friends recognize his skill.
- Using words, “carefully, one hand and one foot,” tell other children with different needs what they can try.

If children do not actively participate in imitation, i.e., fitting cups together, working a puzzle, creating a birthday card, making an animal with clay, and saying, “The bright colored birds must be a male,” specific demonstration, practice, repetition, and training must be considered by the teacher for a child who may not know how to imitate. Consider:

- Demonstrating the skill
- Encouraging the child to “help” you
- Physically guiding the child, if necessary
- Allowing much practice time
- Reinforcing the child’s efforts

Play is the foundation for learning—children come forward and test. Teachers plan a curriculum that uses much play as the medium for learning. Play for **ALL** children is generally inclusive in three (3) areas of learning:

1. About themselves – self-image, competent, independent, and feel good about themselves as a learner.
2. About the world around them – communication, social, observation, initiative, choice, and task completion. They respond to parents and community.
3. Problem solving – observation, investigation, prediction, changes, compromise, and solve problems socially.

A good environment for children with different needs and abilities reflects the teacher's knowledge of inclusion for all children. Assistive technology supports, materials (various sizes, weights, textures, colors) accessible puzzles, chairs, toilet, handles, space, and playground may be needed to enhance the learning environment.

Competence in self-care is a major goal in approaches to learning. The more proficient a child is in caring for his personal needs, the less support he will need to be successful in an inclusive setting. Self-care skills are learned behaviors and can be integrated with all areas of the curriculum—name, color, texture, perceptual motor, and language.

Some different abilities are multiple and affect several areas of development. Teachers and parents must be diligent in observing for signs of other needs. The teacher's role is to provide current information and resources and be available to consult with the team who is working in the best interests of the child. The childcare professional is not an expert in diagnosing, but can be very effective in helping parents secure referrals and treatments.

Positive reinforcement, interesting and appropriate materials, and knowledgeable teacher support are the basis for developing genuine interest and positive reactions from each child with different needs and abilities.